

Toro Olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus hypochloris*: a new record for Tanzania with a description of its song

Carolyn McBride

On a trip to Minziro Forest Reserve in northwest Tanzania in July 2000, I tape-recorded, observed, and mist-netted a Toro Olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus hypochloris*. Although this species is known from Kakamega Forest in western Kenya, and from forests in west and southern Uganda (including Malibigambo Forest, adjacent to Minziro on the Ugandan side of the border), this is the first record of the Toro Olive Greenbul within Tanzania (Keith *et al.* 1992, Friedmann & Williams 1969, Scott 1993). Here I describe the species's vocalisation in detail and clarify inaccurate published descriptions and a misidentified recording of its call.

Observation

On the morning of 26 July 2000, in a heavily disturbed area of seasonally-inundated swamp forest within Minziro Forest Reserve (01°08'S, 31°29'E), I heard two unknown greenbuls calling from dense undergrowth within 2 m of the ground. One of the birds gave a series of churring scolds while the other answered with short 1-2-syllable notes of the same quality and pitch. The calls were surprisingly similar to those of Fischer's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus fischeri*, an East African coastal endemic unknown from so far inland. I approached close enough to tape-record the vocalisations and drew one of the birds into view through playback. Like many greenbuls, the bird lacked distinctive markings. It was dull olive, darker above and lighter below, with a slightly brownish tail and reddish eye. Although its colour and size bore a strong resemblance to Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris* (common at Minziro), the bill was noticeably longer and thinner than that of most *Andropadus* species. Suspecting that the bird might be a Toro Olive Greenbul, I returned to the same location the following day and caught it using a mist-net and a tape lure.

Description

The captured bird was examined closely and identified as a Toro Olive Greenbul by several members of my party (including Liz Baker, Marc Baker and Terry Oatley). Photographs were taken. We made the following description, which matches that of Keith *et al.* (1992) except where italicized:

Bare parts: Bill black with pale olive gape. *Eye rusty brown*. Legs and feet slaty bluish-grey with dull yellow soles. *Claws bluish-grey*.

Head: Tops and sides of head brownish olive-green, *lores greyish*. Cheeks and ear-coverts with narrow grey streaks. Chin and throat pale grey with slight yellow wash.

Upperparts and wings: Back olive-green becoming gingery on rump. Upper tail-coverts dull rufous. Primaries and secondaries dark brown, broadly edged olive-green. Axillaries olive and underwing-coverts pale lemon yellow.

Underparts: Generally lighter than upperparts with pale olive colour and indistinct yellow streaks. Flanks a little darker and *greener*. Centre of belly paler and yellower.

Tail: *bronzy olive-green tinged dark reddish brown* and narrowly edged greenish.

Voice

Recordings were made on 26 and 27 July and 3 and 28 August 2000 (all recordings archived at Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology; catalog # 107716, 107717, 107730, 107775, and 107844). The birds always gave the same type of vocalisation—a variable number of short gurgly or scolding churrs strung together in a series. The first syllable was typically the loudest, highest, and longest, and was followed, after a very brief pause, by 2–9 progressively shorter and slightly lower syllables, given in quick succession. In some instances, particularly in response to playback, the calling bird would add 2–3 more separated, purer, liquid, but still gurgling final notes.

The chattering quality and variable syntax of this vocalisation are characteristic of several other East African *Phyllastrephus* greenbuls, including, Terrestrial *P. terrestris* and Northern Brownbuls *P. strepitans*, Cabanis's *P. cabanisi* and Icterine Greenbuls *P. icterinus* and, especially, Fischer's Greenbul. The vocalisation of Fischer's Greenbul even includes the same stereotypical loud, high, long first syllable followed by a scolding series of shorter, quieter, descending syllables (see Figure 1 for comparison). My experience recording these other *Phyllastrephus* species suggests that the variation in Toro Olive Greenbul vocalisations may form a continuum from 1–3-syllable contact calls to 5–10-syllable mating/territorial 'songs' characterized by the purer, brighter and more liquid final syllables.

Discussion

Almost all of the previously published recordings and descriptions of Toro Olive Greenbul vocalizations (Keith *et al.* 1992, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996, and Chappuis 2000) are based on one misidentified recording and are therefore inaccurate (but see Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002 for an accurate description). This recording, made by A.R. Gregory in western Kenya, features a bird giving a short and clipped 'titwah' rapidly repeated 2–12 times and often preceeded by a shrill chatter. While the recording was made in western Kenya, and song dialects sometimes vary geographically, the vocalizations of Toro Olive

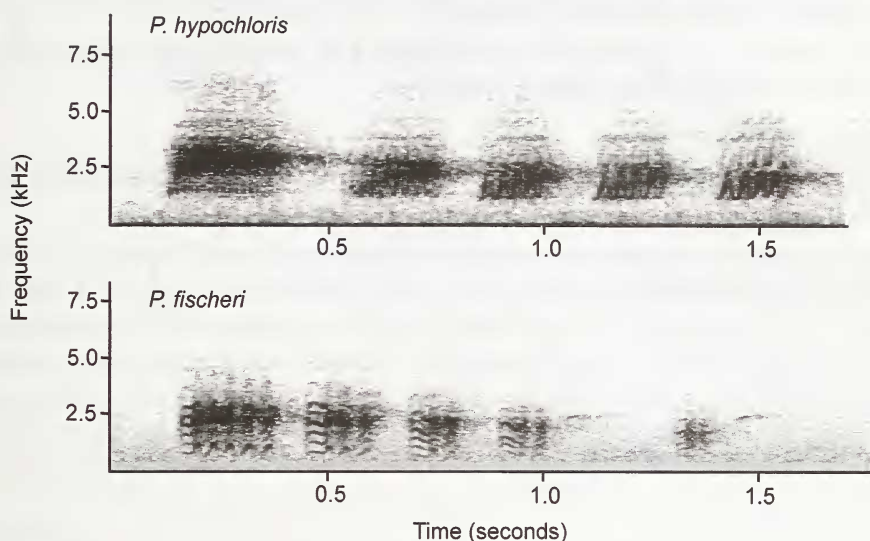


Figure 1. Sonograms of the remarkably similar *P. hypochloris* and *P. fischeri* vocalisations. Both begin with a loud, high, and long first syllable followed in quick succession by several progressively shorter, lower syllables.

Greenbul in western Kenya do not seem to differ significantly from those of northwest Tanzania. In September 2000, I encountered a small group of 2–3 greenbuls in Kakamega Forest (where *P. hypochloris* is known to occur) whose behavior and vocalisations matched those recorded in Minziro the month before. The bird in the recording of A.R. Gregory is almost certainly a Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens* (pers. obs., C. Chappuis pers. comm.).

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Carolyn McBride

Center for Population Biology, University of California, Davis, CA, 95616, USA. Email: cmcbride@ucdavis.edu

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